1;Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

in one instance there had been intermarriage with Sinhalese, and we suspected this in other cases, though the majority appear to be reasonably pure-blooded.

These people make chenas[1] on which they live temporarily in bark-covered huts; Plate X, figure 1, represents the chena settlement of the local group of the Namadewa *waruge*, some of the members of which are shown in Plate X, figure 2. They gather honey and hunt, several of them possess guns, and some of them rear cattle for the Sinhalese villagers. Indeed, for Veddas their lot is singularly happy, since they live in the heart of the park country where game is still abundant. Bailey first induced some Veddas in the Nilgala district to make chenas about the middle of the last century, before which all the Veddas in this district were probably living their natural hunting, honey-gathering life.

It is not often that a community that has taken to the semi-civilised life of chena cultivation is seen, in which its members are so healthy and well fed, for Veddas dislike settling down and do not generally do so until they find they can no longer subsist on the game in the country, when they either drift into Sinhalese settlements, or make extremely rough chenas for themselves, the produce of which is seldom sufficient to feed the community. Besides which, as is the case with the Sinhalese peasants themselves, the crop is often pledged to Moormen pedlars before it is reaped. The poor Veddas then subsist as best they can on yams, honey and berries, and usually fall a prey to fever. Several Veddas in this wretched condition were seen between Namal Oya and Bandaraduwa, while those at Godatalawa were scarcely better off.

In the Nilgala district the conditions are different. Chena making and cattle rearing had been introduced while game was still abundant, families are still able to leave the chena settlement and hunt and gather honey, living during such times in rock shelters within their own hunting boundary. However, the

[1] Bailey defines a chena as "a patch of ground cleared from the forest for cultivation. The jungle is burnt down, a crop taken off, and then suffered to grow up again: it is recleared again after intervals of from five to ten years," *Trans. Ethnol. Soc. N.S.* Vol. II, 1863, p. 282.

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
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115 putation when he first joined our party, but it was very soon evident that he was handier, quicker and more intelligent in every way than the other peasant Sinhalese with whom we came in contact. Still later we discovered that by his influence a large clearing had been illegally made in a remote part of the jungle near Nuwaragala, and that on account of this he was doing his best to prevent our coming in contact with the Sitala Wanniya Veddas in whose territory the clearing had been made. Although in this he played us false and caused much needless trouble we found him in other matters a perfectly trustworthy witness, and as he had associated more or less constantly with the Kovil Vanamai Veddas from the age of 10 to 20, there is every reason 161 to accept his account of their condition 25 years ago. At this 221 time there were about 50 families, i.e. some 200 people, who led 621 a wandering hunting life for half of the year, during which time they lived in rock shelters and depended largely on honey; for the rest of the year they paid more or less attention to chena cultivation, growing especially maize and *kurakhan* (*Eleusine coracana*). Two or three families—not necessarily the same year after year—would usually wander and hunt together; such groups of families might also make chenas together, though five or six families would often join to make a single chena.

222 Although they had a few guns even 20 years ago, bows and 411 arrows were in common use and much of their hunting consisted 423 of monkey drives. There were no mixed Sinhalese and Vedda 621 chenas then. The Arachi remembers three caves belonging to the ancestors of the present Bandaraduwa Veddas, viz. Walimbagalagalge, Ellavellagalge and Vianbendegalge. Each family was the recognised possessor of one or more rocky hills on which there were colonies of the rock bee, but the whole of the small hunting community would join to collect honey from each hill and the honey was always equally shared.

614 The Kovil Vanamai Veddas belonged to Morane and Unapane and Uru *waruge*. The latter lived apart near Uniche, i.e. between Tumpalamcholai and the coast. The Arachi states 197 that the language has altered during the last 20 years, Tamil 128 tending to displace Sinhalese, thus *tirakodoi*, "nothing," is said

1;Seligmann & Seligmann E-S (1907-1908) 1911
AXS Vedda AXS

Besides the important part in the Vedda cult of the dead played by the propitiation of the *Nae Yaku*, and of the *yaku* of certain other Veddas such as Kande Wanniya who as *yaku* have attained to special importance (approaching that of culture heroes in other forms of belief), there is a certain feeling of reverence for a host of unnamed *yaku*. Little attention is paid to these but, since it is stated that they too were once men, the suggestion may be hazarded that they represent the *yaku* of the forgotten dead. These *yaku*, although all around in the jungle, are in some instances thought of as vaguely attached to special localities, especially to glades in the forest, unusually large trees, and above all large rocks and rocky hilltops. The *yaku* of rocks and hilltops, indeed, tend to become named, taking the name of the hill they inhabit; even among the less civilised Veddas they are sometimes identified with the *yaku* of Vedda headmen who have lived on or near the hills. On the other hand among the more sophisticated Veddas these *yaku* tend to become less and less the spirits of dead Veddas, and finally, under Tamil influence, are thought of as dangerous spirits, immigrants from beyond the Ocean, each of whom with a female of his own species haunts the hilltops and sends disease. Somewhat akin to these *yaku* in their less dangerous forms are the *kiriamma* (literally milk mothers, i.e. grandmothers), the *yaku* of Vedda women, generally the wives of Vedda headmen or chiefs, many of whom are thought of as haunting the sides and tops of hills where there are rocks and springs. They are sometimes jealous of people gathering honey—indeed there is a tendency to avoid rocky mountain tops on their account—but may be placated by a charm, though occasionally a little honey is left for them with a muttered *kapau kiriammala*—Eat O Kiriamma. Although they retain the fondness for children which they felt in their lifetime they not infrequently send sickness, at least among the more sophisticated Veddas.

A few *kiriamma* have become rather important *yaku*, notably an old woman of the Unapane clan now known as Unapane Kiriamma, but such *kiriamma* do not appear to be especially associated with rocky or hilly sites.

We are now in a position to discuss the possible evolution of

1;Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

Yaku, while at nearly all the village Vedda communities Indigollae Yaka was said to bring the *Nae Yaku*. Certainly Gale Yaka, Indigollae Yaka and Kande Yaka were all known by name, but there seemed much confusion between them all: perhaps Gale Yaka had become Lord of the Dead as he was invoked before the *Nae Yaku* in the same ceremony; Kande Yaka and Bilindi Yaka were invoked at a separate ceremony. No hint was given us that Gale Yaka and Indigollae Yaka were names for the same spirit, but of course this may have been so. The information that Indigollae Yaka was extremely powerful both to bring evil upon man and to help them to get game was, however, volunteered and, as already mentioned, some old, specially valuable beads were kept to be offered to him.

Gale Yaka was also invoked to give success when gathering honey; he appeared to be associated with a certain rock near Mahaella, and we were told that beads were worn during the ceremony.

The Maha Kiriamma was said to be one of the most powerful of the *Maha Yakino*, a class of female spirits who were said to send sickness[1]. Unapane Yakini (Unapane Kiriamma) was another *yakini* of the same class who was thought to live at Omunigala. Here as among many other groups of Veddas the *Maha Yakino* were associated with hill tops, and it was the custom for people collecting the honey of the rock bee to leave a piece of the comb *in situ*, saying, "Eat, O Kiriamma[2]."

When the *Maha Yakino* are invoked to cure sickness a basket is used in which are put a bead necklace and bangles and the leaves of a *na* tree. The shaman becomes possessed and raises the basket above the patient's head and prophesies recovery. The leaves are subsequently thrown away, but the beads and bangles are preserved for the *Yakino*. Presumably this is the origin of the similar or identical use of these objects in the *kolamaduwa* ceremony which, however, appears to be of Sinhalese origin.

[1] Nothing was ever said to cause us to suspect that she was connected with Gale Yaka or Indigollae Yaka.

[2] Kiriamma is in the plural in the Sinhalese, showing that all the *Maha Yakino* in the neighbourhood were invoked to partake.

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-S (1907-1908) 1911
AX8 Vedda AX8

THE DOLA YAKA CEREMONY.

222 437 Collecting honey is almost as important to the Vedda as hunting, for not only is honey valuable as food but it is one of the most important articles of barter, and every year at the end of the honey season the Moormen pedlar[1] penetrates into the wildest parts of the jungle with iron, cloth, pots and beads to exchange for the highly prized jungle honey.

222 776 796 Nor is honey collecting without risk, for the "Little People of the Rocks" can be very angry, and their sting is deadly. Hence the Veddas ask for success in honey collecting from their natural protectors the *yaku*, and Dola Yaka is especially invoked for this purpose. Although there is no tradition concerning his actions or his dwelling place his aid is invoked for success in collecting *bambara* honey from trees, and for the more dangerous task of cutting the combs from the craggy hill tops and rock faces in which the colonies of the rock bee make their homes. The successful invocation of Dola Yaka can only take place in the early afternoon at the time when the bees are most active in visiting flowers.

796 778 A *maesa* with a single platform about 4 ft 6 in. from the ground was built, and two arrows were fixed in the centre of the space cleared for the dance (Plate XLVII). A betel leaf was placed on the top of each and pressed down on the shaft so that it rested on the feathers, and a small bead necklace was looped over the head of each arrow and rested on the betel leaf. These leaves were said to represent the large bundles of leaves which the Veddas use to smoke the bees from the comb, and the necklaces represent the creeper by which the twigs would be tied together and by which it would be lowered over the cliff edge. It was noted that one arrow was taller than the other, and we were told that the taller arrow was the one which would be used in cutting the comb, and that when the honey was taken it would be thrust through the withy binding the bundle of leaves used

[1] The term Moormen is applied to the numerous Mohammedans who make their living as shopkeepers and pedlars. Many of them are proud of their alleged Arabic descent, but it is only in a minority that skin colour or features suggest Arab blood, and the appearance of the majority of Moormen scarcely differs from that of the Tamils of the East Coast, among whom their most considerable settlements are found.

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-S (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

Invocations to Bambura Yaka.

The invocations to Bambura Yaka are the most puzzling of all those we collected. None of our informants understood them and the translations given were fragmentary, or else we were told that although the words of the sentences could be translated so as to make some sort of sense, the significance of the invocation was unknown, or if appreciated did not necessarily agree with the meaning of the literal translation. Further, although it is certain that Bambura Yaka especially gives success in searching for yams and hunting pig, Mr Parker's translations make it quite certain that these invocations really apply to honey collecting. The reference to the "golden creeper," i.e. the ladder made of jungle creepers and used in taking honey, lowered across the face of the Inginiya rock makes this certain. Nevertheless both at Sitala Wanniya and Uniche, invocations with these expressions in them were recited as invocations to Bambura Yaka to send pig, and none of our informants regarded Bambura Yaka as having anything to do with honey. It may be suggested tentatively that the resemblance in sound of Bambura the home of the *yaka* and *bambara*, the word for the rock bee, may have brought about this confusion.

Sitala Wanniya.

XXVII. *Mē magē Bamburuṇi, Bamburaṇi. Magē Bamburō bat haddī nāḷow nāḷow gala gala suniyantyō.*

Mē masā muratala guḍu maḍāni maḍuhat hāpu hapala sindu dīyā hapa no kiyandō. Mē kuḍā Inginiyā gulaṭa hāpu rav wasla gulat gala gula mē wara wasti gelā.

This is my Bamburā, Bamburā. While my Bamburā is eating rice make a sound, make a sound, "gala, gala"—save, save (him)—by magic.

At this very instant destroying the mounds (on the face of the rock) be pleased to give to the mouth that has eaten honey (the power to sing) songs (correctly and) not to speak nonsense. Save, save (both) the golden creeper that has been lowered down this little Inginiya rock and the rock, (or otherwise) this time the rock will fall.

"Bamburō (pl.) and Bamburani are honorific forms of Bamburā. Compare *Maharajani*, used in addressing a king.

1;Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

411 648 It appears that painted and lacquered arrows were sometimes presented to the Veddas by the Sinhalese kings as signs of gratitude or favour, just as ceremonial forms of other objects were presented to particular Sinhalese[1]. Dr Willey told me of a lacquered bow and arrow which he heard of among a community of sophisticated Veddas, and which he was told ultimately found their way to the Kandy Museum. Among the peasant Sinhalese of Nilgala we heard of a lacquered arrow—said to have been lost recently—which, according to tradition, had been presented many generations ago to the Vedda ancestors of its last owner by one of the kings of Ceylon. With regard to the specimen in the Kandy Museum, the arrow is feathered in the usual Vedda style, the condition of the lacquer on it shows that it is of considerable age. The iron which is said to belong to it is loose, and it is entirely unlike any arrow head we have seen. Instead of having a tang it has a socket into which the end of the shaft must have fitted, and there is a shoulder or "stop" upon the iron. The bow shown us as having been acquired with the arrow was in much better condition and had a small band of silver or some metal resembling silver round it. According to the account given at the museum both specimens were procured from a priest who gave a history of the specimens which does not connect them with any Veddas[2].

224 177 Traps and snares are unknown among the least sophisticated Veddas, but at Danigala we saw a small deadfall trap avowedly introduced.

HONEY.

● 222 The importance of honey in the Vedda diet has been mentioned in Chapter IV as well as the large part it plays in barter. The honey of the *bambara* (*Apis indica*) is taken in June and July, though at other times of the year small combs are taken

[1] There is in the Colombo Museum a beautifully lacquered weaver's shuttle, presented to certain cloth makers by one of the Sinhalese kings.

[2] It was stated that the bow and arrow had been found in the verandah of a disused house with some broken articles said to have been thrown there, having been taken from the *walawwa* (house) of Molligoda Adigar. The house was in the Kegalle district. The villagers gave the bow and arrow to a priest who brought them to the museum.

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

from trees. Besides the *bambara* other species including the small stingless bee supply a considerable quantity. The first two months of our sojourn in the Vedda country (January and February) was at a time when honey was particularly scarce, and even at the end of March and in April it was not abundant, yet such was the courtesy of the Veddas that each community managed to make us a small present of honey, though this often entailed a long search, and the combs were frequently full of grubs. In two communities only, which were better off than the others, namely Danigala and Kulukalaeba, were we given large pots of strained honey, the remains of the previous year's store.

The manner in which *bambara* colonies are regarded as property has been discussed in Chapter V. Writing in 1886 Nevill says, "Honey forms a great part of their diet. It is eaten fresh in large quantities, wax and all; combs with young bees in them being considered especially wholesome. It was also the practice formerly to store strips of dried meat in honey, filling in a cavity of some tree with it, the cavity being first lined with clay. At present they barter away their surplus meat and honey, during the hunting season, and keep no store for the rainy season. This often brings privation and is one cause of the rapid decrease in their numbers.

"They tell me their health is never so good as when their food largely consists of yams and honey.

"To procure honey they rapidly cut open hollow trees, even of the hardest wood; and to take the hives of the large black bambara bee, they make long ladders of cane, called 'rang kendiya,' by which they descend precipices, and cut off the combs adhering to their sides.

"They do this at night, generally, as the bees are not so savage then; and smoke them with a sort of resin. The hives are often cut off with a sort of wooden sword, made for the occasion. These frail ladders swing fearfully, and the task is so dangerous, only the boldest and most athletic attempt it. While engaged on the task they sing lustily, songs specially made, which appease the spirit of the rock, and prevent him from dashing the hunter off the ladder. They also go about

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

the work with songs, so as to get up a certain degree of excitement, necessary to carry them through the task. A song is chanted, and a little honey sprinkled for the spirits, before the combs are cut off the rock[1]."

Fig. 13.
Mastiya × 1/12.

Before honey collecting as many pots as possible are made and old pots and gourds are overhauled. The wooden sword which Nevill mentions is probably the *mastiya* (fig. 12). This is a stout stick about 2½ metres long with four prongs at one end, which the Vedda carries hanging by a loop from his forearm and which he uses to detach the comb and convey it into the vessel called a *maludema* in which the honey is collected. This is also carried hanging from the forearm and should be made of deer's hide so that it may not be broken against the rocks as the honey collector swings to and fro. Plate LXV shows a *maludema* collected at Sitala Wanniya. An arrow is also carried and is largely used in detaching the combs from the rock.

Before taking the honey a bundle of green leaves is set alight and lowered in order to stupefy the bees. The smoker is called *odiya* (Sin. *kula*) and the creeper attached to it *yotuvella*[2]. Several men of the community join together to collect rock-honey, the whole spoil being equally divided without any special consideration for the owner of the land, though it seemed that the owner would decide when the honey should be collected. The women accompany their men to crags and gulleys where the *bambara* build their combs. They hold torches and sing while the honey is being collected.

Plate LXVI shows a gourd, used as a hive for a colony of the stingless bee, hanging outside one

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 190.

[2] For the use of these see Chapter IV where the pantomime of honey getting is described.

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

of the huts in the Morane chena settlement at Henebedda. It was shown us with pride by Handuna who said he was keeping it for his twelve year old son. He told us that in the old days the hollow branches, the homes of colonies of these bees, were frequently kept in the rock-shelters.

The ladder with the help of which *bambara* honey is collected consists of a greatly elongated loop of cane, apparently derived from a species of *Calamus*, across which rungs of creeper are stretched. In Plate LV (p. 290) there can be seen the bottom of the ladder some fifty feet long, used for training the young, hung from the top of the cliff across the face of the rock mass at Sitala Wanniya. In spite of the fact that honey is usually gathered at night the Veddas do not travel or hunt at night and know only two stars by name. One of these is a star or more probably a planet which often appears close to the moon and is called *pantaru* which, we were told, is the name by which the Sinhalese know it. The other named star appears soon after sunset, always in the same place and before the other stars, and is almost certainly Venus; this is called *irabada tarua*, i.e. "side of sun star." Although the Veddas hunt in the dusk of the dawn the idea that anyone would roam about at night seemed absolutely ludicrous to them (Sitala Wanniya), they roared with laughter at it, "why should one go into the jungle? it would be too dark to see to shoot, besides bears are about, absurd idea," they laughed again, in fact it was quite ten minutes before Kaira had forgotten the joke.

MASTICATORIES.

All Veddas chew eagerly, but as they can rarely obtain a supply of areca nuts they commonly use instead of these the bark of the *demata* tree (*Gmelina asiatica*) and the *dawata* tree (*Carallia integerrima*). Concerning the other plants that they use as masticatories Nevill says, "They occasionally chew the leaves of several aromatic herbs, particularly *Anisochilus suffruticosus*, a sort of sage that grows on rocks. The areca does not grow wild in the Eastern Province, but Veddas are very fond of the seeds of the lakada bush, *Gardenia carinata*, a

2:Bailey G-5 (ca. 1854) 1863
AX5 Vedda AX5

ward, shoot their long-bladed arrows in the soft fleshy part under the forearm, and so disable him.* 224

They have a great dread of meeting elephants at night, and have charms to protect them from them—not only to turn them from their path, but to render innoxious the bear, the leopard, and the wild boar. And I must here record, that they are the only charms I have entire faith in. 825 789

I never shall forget the first time one of these Veddah charms was recited for my edification. It was midnight; I was in the heart of a dense and gloomy forest, twenty miles from any habitation. The moon had not quite risen, and the stems of the trees and the gigantic pendent creepers were flickering in the uncertain light cast by the torches, which my Veddah guides, gliding through the forest, bore before me. I was chatting to an intelligent Veddah by my side and then learnt for the first time, that they had charms, having been till then, like Tennent, ignorant of the fact.† I begged him to recite one—and, in an instant, the forest re-echoed with such unearthly yells, that I felt he would be a bold bear indeed, whose heart did not die within him, and whose legs did not carry him far out of hearing of the repeated and discordant "behegang! wirooowee! wiroowah!" which formed the burden of the charm. Of its perfect efficacy, my friend had no doubt; nor indeed had I, but he was rather huffed when I suggested that the mere noise may have had something to do with its success.‡

Honey, and the grub in the comb, before it becomes the bee, are both staple food with the Veddahs, and their acuteness in discovering hives, when bee-hunting, is very remarkable. I have seen a Veddah stealing through the forest, suddenly stop—listen for an instant with uplifted hand—dart off into the jungle and return in an incredibly short space of time with a fresh honey-comb; while I have been in vain endeavouring 222 [262]

* This fact I established beyond a doubt. I questioned many Veddahs on that practice, which Knox treats as a fable, p. 63, viz., striking an axe into the sole of an elephant's foot; and I was assured by several that, though they never practise it themselves, the Veddahs of Batticaloa do, and that they even hamstring elephants. To those who know the pluck and dexterity of the professed elephant catchers in the north of the island, there is nothing extraordinary or incredible in a Veddah approaching sufficiently close to an elephant to wound his foot or to hamstring him. But I have inquired, and cannot satisfactorily establish the truth of the statement; and I confess that I am inclined to doubt their physical power to do either.

† Tennent, vol. ii, part ix, chap. iii, p. 448, 2nd edit.

‡ Tennent, vol. i, part ii, chap. i, p. 139, gives a lamentable account of the inefficacy of a charm for bears. I dare say the unhappy moorman there mentioned would have been more fortunate had he known the Veddah charm. The Singhalese have charms for the same purpose; but they differ from those of the Veddahs. [171]

2: Bailey G-5 (ca. 1854) 1863
AX5 Vedda AX5

222 to catch the hum of bees, which so instantaneously struck his ear. Their forest life naturally quickens their powers both of seeing and hearing, and renders them, in these respects, far superior to those whose more civilized lives do not compel them to rely on those faculties for their daily food.

They take honey in the manner common to the Singhalese. The bee-hunter enlarges with his small axe the hole in the tree at which the bee enters, and putting his mouth to the aperture, blows into it. This has generally the effect of making the bees fly out; or, at least, of making them vacate the comb, and retire into the innermost recesses of the hollow tree, when the honey can be taken with the hand. If this do not succeed, however, a second puff, after the bee-hunter has chewed some aromatic substance, has the desired effect.

222 283 481 Taking the honey of the bambera (*apis Indica*), a large and very venomous bee, is a much more serious affair. This bee hives on very lofty trees, or in clefts of precipitous rocks. If on a tree, the hunter ties tendrils to it, and armed with a bundle of blazing faggots, climbs to the vicinity of the comb and smokes the bees out, being often severely stung during the operation. If in a cleft of rock, he will, if he cannot otherwise approach it, lower himself with ropes made of creepers, and take the honey by the same process.

439 To the Veddahs, honey is not only favourite food, but valuable as an object of barter, for the Kandyans prize it greatly for medicinal purposes. They use it, too, as Knox tells us, for pre-
251 serving flesh. "They cut a hollow tree and put honey in it, and then fill it with flesh, and stop it with clay, which lyes for a reserve to eat in time of want."* And when they are short of food, they mix honey with decayed wood, and so eat it. It
261 satisfies their craving more readily than plain honey. Davy properly describes the practice, as "not so much for nourishment as to distend the empty stomach and to allay the distressing feelings of emptiness and the pains of hunger." It is curious that Tennent should have entirely omitted all allusion to this remarkable custom. "Romba" is the term used by the Veddahs, for this decayed wood, and the practice I have described may have given rise to the epithet, which Knox applies to the "wild sort" called "Ramba Veddahs," who, he says, "never shew themselves"—but no "sort" is so called now, nor is the name remembered.†

* Knox, part iii, chap. i, p. 63.

[824] † Knox, part iii, chap. i, p. 63. The wood so used is chiefly that of the eriminia creeper (*zizyphus œnophlia*, Mill.), the ettamba—wild mango (*mangifera Indica*, Quin.), the weera (*hemicyclia sepiaria*, W. and A.), the rêna, the nooga, a species of fig; any wood, indeed, not poisonous, is used. They reject the wood of the kaduru (*cerbera odallum*, Gmstn.), the goda

4:Lewis N-5 (ca. 1906-1918) 1919
AX5 Vedda AX5

136 quite close to me. Presently one of them lit on my wrist, and began sipping the moisture as it came from my skin. The second insect quickly followed exactly the same procedure on my slowly extending my arm.

At a small puddle, measuring about 2 ft. by 18 in., I found the whole of the damp ground covered with wasps sipping the moisture.

Some idea of the dryness of the locality can be judged from these instances, and I submit that animal distribution must be affected thereby.

137 The distribution of plants, not of direct value to man, moreover shows certain erratic conditions. The most striking instance of this is in the distribution of the Dipterocarps. At Monaragala, and a little to the eastward, our common Hora (*Dipterocarpus zeylanicus*) is moderately plentiful. From Liyangalla onwards towards the east it is absent, but to the north-east of Siyambala-anduwa, near the village of Newgalla, one finds fringes of *Vatica obscura* on the banks of the dry streams; in other words, there is an enormous belt of country the opposite sides of which have representations of this important order of trees, with no examples in the intermediate area.

On the other hand I found no examples of *Vatica obscura* to the south of Siyambala-anduwa on any of the streams I crossed.

Of the Dilleniaceæ, I found *Dillenia indica* on the higher reaches of the Heda-oya, and a few individual examples—probably introduced—towards Waragoda in the north and at Kumuna in the south-east.

Of the Anonaceæ, the usual dry-zone *Polyalthias* are very abundant. Both *Anamirta paniculata* and *Tinospora cordifolia* are abundant representations of the Menispermaceæ.

In the tanks where there was water, both *Nymphæa lotus* and *Nelumbium speciosum* are common Lotuses. Both roots [227] and bulbs of these plants are eaten.

In some of the chenas I found *Brassica juncea* grown with the other crops, but I could get no definite explanation why it was cultivated.

Of the Capparideæ, the typical *Capparis zeylanica* is plentiful. [262] Its fruits are eaten by the Veddas as well as the Tamils. I

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1948 AX5 Vedda AX5

"We had hardly gained the base of the rock when we heard human voices and soon came up with three men and their dogs. One fellow carried a gun, the others had axes hitched to their shoulders. They were on their way to a devil dancing ceremony at a house of illness some miles away; but abandoning their project they accompanied us to their homes.

In a small clearing stood half a dozen leafy shelters. Outside one of these, three women with infants at the breast were seated roasting small yellow flowers. The rest of their people were at work on a *chena** close by. We summoned them and soon we had all the Veddas of the *Kosgaha Ulpotta* before us—some six or eight men and about a dozen women and children. They were a poor lot bearing the stigmata of malaria and framboesia. There was but one old man among them. The children were emaciated and languid.

Most of them showed strong traces of Tamil admixture, especially the women; what poor ornaments they wore, their clothing, and even their very names were Tamil; and so were their predilections if the coy smiles one or two of them bestowed on the fine Tamil that accompanied us signified anything. There were at least three men, however, true to Vedda type—short of stature, wild-eyed, with beardless face and upstanding frizzly hair.

They had no bows among them, except as playthings for the children, but made us one as a memento and stained it with charcoal and *thimbiri* to give it the appearance of use.

The huts were fashioned of wattle and leaves, and thatched with dry grass. Their domestic appointments comprised earthen pots, a wooden pestle and mortar, bark rope, and a deer skin or two.

Fruits, flowers, wild yams, honey, the flesh of animals, *kurrukhan*† and maize formed their food. The meat they fancied most was that of the langur and monitor lizard which they hunted with the lazy mongrels that loitered about. They eat abundantly and at any hour when food is plentiful; but as a rule one good meal a day is all they expect; in times of dearth they bear hunger stoically, chewing incessantly a few varieties of bark they carry in pouches fashioned of cloth saturated with melted wax (*itee rethee*). Partial nomads, they spend many months of the year under trees and in caves. Where the *palu*, *veera*, *kong*, or *mora*‡ fruit is ripe, where the hives are, there they take their women and children, dogs, and chattels and go.

"How often do you bathe?" I asked one of them, the smell of their ring-wormed bodies suggesting little acquaintance with water.

"What bathing for us," he replied. "We fall into a stream once in a way and get out again; that is our bath. And we only do that when our stomachs are full. When we are hungry we don't care for anything; we can eat even a man then!"

In answer to the question how they measured distances and what constituted a mile, the reply was, "We walk till our legs hurt, then we place our axes on the ground, sit down, take out our pouches, and chew a quid; that is our mile".

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*A patch of forest cleared for cultivation

†*Eleusine coracana*

‡*Minusops hexandra, Hemicyclia sepiaria, Schleichera trijuga, Nephelium longana*, respectively.

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Vela was an interesting little chap and, unlike the others, had always something to say for himself. He entertained us with charms, pleasing lullabies, and songs of rock and stream demons that came as fast as *na* leaves shaken by the wind, in the guise of bears, their mouths adrip with human blood. These he sang despite warnings from the others who reminded him that he had sucked a chicken bone, which was a dangerous thing to do before invoking devils lest it invite their anger.

Coming to a pool, brown with decaying leaves, we asked if the water was good. "Very good," said a Vedda, adding the epicurean touch, "Those fallen flowers floating there make the water sweet; they are the flowers that give good honey."

It was high noon when Veddas left us to go in search of food. But Vela lingered to tell us of the oppression of the local headman. Did they but catch a young deer or pea-chick that came their way they were prosecuted. The visiting apothecary too was bad; he gave them no medicines except for gifts of honey or meat; and the poor fellows had little enough for themselves.

Having visited a cave containing the battered remains of an old Buddha, we continued our circuit of the rock; and after a walk of an hour and a half under a burning sky, came to the Veddas of the *Kudda Ulpotha*. These had no huts of any sort, but merely sat grouped in families under various trees. It was the season of the *kong* fruit, of which there was plenty about. Women were boiling down the luscious pulp with which to make cakes, or extracting from the seeds an oil said to be good for sores and wounds. Very fond of the fruit they all were; it had been their only sustenance for days. One little urchin, his mouth be-ringed with parangi ulcers, was licking clean a coconut shell containing the acrid juice, with a relish worthy of a tastier dish.

The patriarch of the settlement, Naida, and his wife were typical Veddas; but here again most of the others showed Tamil admixture. One man had a large scar across his face. The manner he came by it illustrates well the aggressiveness of the little Ceylon sloth-bear. When out collecting honey he saw a she-bear and her cub. Realizing the certain disaster of such an encounter he cautiously climbed a tree; but in doing so snapped a twig and gave himself away. With a series of blood-curdling cries she charged him, and clambering up the tree, bit and clawed him severely. A large flap was torn from his face. This his father sewed up with a thorn and fibre, and doctored with a result that might have done credit to any surgeon. Living as they invariably do in the neighbourhood of rocks, and having kindred tastes in honey, yams, and fruit, the Veddas and bears often encounter each other, as the ugly scars on many of the men testify.

As, footsore and tired, we rounded the southern end of the rock towards evening, we met parties of Veddas returning with basketfuls of *kong* fruit. One youth was up a tree making the jungle ring to his song as he beat down the berries. As it darkened we reached Manampitiya, but not before we had worried a blind old owl that had descended to a streamlet to quench its thirst.

It is hard to forget that first experience of the Veddas in their homes: those voices in the jungle, that sight of their huts among the trees, and of their women roasting dainty little flowers for food.

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361 [103] to a cleft fragment of stone resembling a giant lizard crawling up the sheer face of the rock.

[241] We found Bowala deserted. The young coconut and areca palms, plantains, sugar-canes and pine-apples there were choked with grass and lantana. The huts were falling to pieces and leaked like sieves as we found to our cost when a shower overtook us; the grass thatch, ruined [136] by white ants, was the home of innumerable rats, brahmin-lizards and poisonous *karawalas** that hung head-down from the rafters ready to strike.

221 The desolate state of the hamlet is explainable by the *chena* life of the people. In December, as the crops ripen, they forsake their homes for the shacks of the *chena*, leaving perhaps an aged couple behind. In April, when the crops of *kurrukkan* and maize have been taken, they return to the village to repair their huts and wean back to life such plants as have survived the inroads of wild animals and weeds. In July, *chena* land is leased again; and so the wasteful routine is repeated. 621 A hamlet occupied for six months and abandoned for six has not much chance of headway. If the population of a village is at all numerous, there are sufficient people to occupy both *chena* and village, without detriment to either; if the community is very small they remain *chena* dwellers with no permanent homes; if intermediate, we find the state of things at Bowala. In favoured places a mere nucleus of human beings swells in time to a thriving and populous village. But in the insalubrious *Vanni* privation and ignorance keep the numbers low. Two dwindling villages may combine to save one from extinction. Often a place populous to-day is a wilderness to-morrow and *vice versa*. This is typical of the kaleidoscopic way the forest hamlets change. Names so fine on maps—Illukpitiya, Mahaella, Embillene—are found when reached to be derelict; a crumbling hut perhaps hidden in jungle, or a hardy tamarind or palmyrah the sole witness of vanished homes.

101 Bowala folk are better jungle men than many farther inland. Though [262] far from fastidious in their choice of meats, for they eat the mongoose and rat, they abhor the porcupine, sure mark of Vedda ancestry. They [287] fashion bags of beaten *riti* bark and carry pouches of monkey skin that [28] ladies might envy. Their bed-frames are spanned with sambur-hide, 415 their powder flasks are the dried scrota of sambur. A monkey skin, stretched over a coconut shell fitted with handle, screw and string, and [534] manipulated with a small bow, serves them as a violin out of which they 224 scrape mournful disharmonies. They snare the smaller animals, such as the hare, pangolin and chevrotan, with *habbakas* or weighted frames poised over passages used by these animals; we saw one of these set for 222 chevrotan with a bundle of urine-drenched leaves for bait. Some among 481 them could brave the formidable heights of Westminster Abbey in quest of the combs of the rock bee—the most hazardous of jungle pursuits.

000 We spent the night in a large cave at the base of Westminster Abbey and made the ascent next morning, replenishing our water bottles at a small basin formed by the buttressing roots of a rock-tamarind and rejoicing in the grandiloquent name, for so trivial a thing, of *Kothuru-pathaha* (gnat-water-hole).

It had rained all night and there was still a drizzle. Squeezing through crevices, crouching through low caves, climbing trees, clinging to rough

*Small venomous snakes.

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ladders prepared for us beforehand, we made the laborious ascent; finally shinning up the interlacing roots of an obliging banyan tree that gripped a great hump of rock, we attained the summit of the northern bastion. Here we found the usual signs of old-world occupation: cisterns and seats cut out of the living rock, fragments of brick and pottery, and strong stone walls overrun with scrub and pine-apple.

The height was desolate but for wild cats, and songless but for the boom of wanderoo far below. A ceaseless drizzle blanketed in mist the superb view of forest and hill we commanded; but every now and then the mist lifted and showed the graceful contours of the ranges. There, crouching like a headless beast, its neck indrawn, was magnificent Wadinagala; to the south was the long straight ridge of Moneragala; and close at hand were the twin domes named by the Veddas *Thanagoda* (breast mounds) and behind them *Thanakirigoda* (breast milk mound) with wracks of milky mist caressing their summits.

On our descent we were better able to discern certain features of the rock the rain had so far hidden from us. Out of long horizontal fissures high on the perpendicular face of the hill, projected numerous sticks driven in for foot-hold by honey-gatherers; and dangling from the summit was a long cane that had once borne a daring fellow within reach of seemingly unassailable hives. Here we heard a marvellous tale: A Vedda of Bowala once saw a heap of wax that had accumulated on a ledge which an overhanging brow of rock made inaccessible. Nothing daunted, he armed himself with a torch and sambur-horn, descended by just such a cane as we now saw, and swung himself to and fro within reach of the wax, heating it with the torch each time he approached it. When he thought the mass sufficiently molten he stuck the horn deep into it and waited till it set. Then swinging himself once more towards it and seizing hold of the embedded horn, he leaped on to the ledge collected the wax, and swung off again. He did this year by year. On the last occasion, the horn not being sufficiently secure, the poor fellow was dashed to death among the trees and stones below. His wife who had witnessed the tragedy carried back word, "*Meena kalanghal-angme popekorai*," which being onomatopoeic hardly requires rendering.

Our departure from Bowala was ceremonial. On the path stood a drummer, with two boyish figures disguised from head to foot in dry plantain leaves, that were plaited into tails behind. Their faces were hidden by speckled masks made from fragments of gourd-rind, with slits for eyes and mouth, and a blob of resin with fibres attached for nose and beard. Their bare feet and hands were the only indications that these scare-crows were in reality human beings.

The drummer struck; the dance began. The time twelve noon. The floor a root-ridden path bestrewn with elephant droppings and intercepted by beflowered streams. The walls, bordering forest trees festooned with great lianas on which parrots chattered. The dazzling sky above. For orchestra, the staccato rhythm of the drum, the jangling bells that studded the deerskin greaves of the dancers, the sound of a falling branch perhaps, or the short, sharp clamorous outburst of chirping cicalas. For a mile or more the performers led the way with a swaying two-step dance, hopping circularly on one leg to let us catch up did they out-distance us. At the next village the drummer wore the greaves, and

A [the hill called Westminster Abbey. – Analyst]

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Even a Vedda child should be able to pick its way through the jungle with no mark to guide it."

We had travelled thus a long while, and for all I knew had lost all trace of the Veddas, when we struck a stream where the foot-prints of a man and a dog were evident. Soon we were climbing up to Dhik-galge, to find, alas! that not only was it deserted, but that no Veddas had been near it for many a long day. The Veddas had lied to the Chetty!

The cave we found ourselves in was a magnificent one—long, spacious and open to the sky, with tall straight trees towering before it. Below, a stream babbled over rocks, making delightful bathing pools. Around, was the tenderest music of birds. It was a romantic spot, specially designed, as it were, by Nature for the jungle-dweller. The dome of the cave was covered with crude drawings. A broken pot had been put in a niche. There were fragments of filthy rag, a large cooking frame and dry leaves which had long previously been slept upon. The rocky floor was smooth in places where *kurrukkan* had been rubbed to flour with flat worn stones, and cupped where maize had been pounded. The *aratchi* of Paragahakelle had spoken true. A handful of moss, peeping from a crevice, revealed, when disturbed, a couple of fledglings. Our first thought was that they were young swiftlets, left there to die by ruthless nest-hunters; but they flew too strongly for that; and soon, the piteous cries of the parent birds told us that we had inadvertently rifled a fly-catcher's nest.

It was mid-day, and, being very tired, we sat down to a meal; I to camp-pie and chocolate, the others to raw cassava. Our hunger abated, I reminded our guides that my offer of a reward still stood, and that he would get it, who brought me up with even one of those Veddas wherever he might be. Asking us to stay where we were, Meenemaruwa and the half-Vedda of Galmede vanished into the jungle.

The better part of an hour must have elapsed when we heard the latter calling to us excitedly. He said that Meenemaruwa was in hot pursuit of the Veddas who, to judge by their traces, were making away at great speed, evidently scared by the sight of my shoe-prints.

Following at a run, we eventually came upon them—a wild, swarthy group of two men and two boys, freighted with the spoils of the chase; each with his sackful of edible bird's nests, dried sambur meat and *bambara* honey; the leaders with two old muzzle-loaders. May the picture not fade. Suthubanda was there, and the youth Badapissa as our sleuths had told us. But the figure that arrested my fancy most was a wild, fiery-eyed, shaggy-haired fellow of twenty-five—an ebon Apollo. Gama he was called because he was born on a journey (*gamana*). To his waist was attached the inflated bladder of the sambur they had killed. Nor did his looks belie his character, for, even as we came up, he flared into foul-mouthed fury at a tired, inoffensive boy of their company.

They were delighted with the tobacco and betel we shared out to them, and gave us honey in return. Money they refused. When we asked them how it was that they had not been in Dhik-galge as they had said they were, their only answer was a hearty laugh!

It was hail and farewell! for the hour was past noon, and the Veddas had many miles to make before nightfall; so had we. But those shadows of the spangled forest were soon to call me again.

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2. VEDDA CHARACTERISTICS, RELIGION, AND SUPERSTITION

If 'tis not a true philosophy
That the spirit when set free,
Still lingers about its olden home,
In the flower and the tree,
It is very strange that our pulses thrill
At the sight of a voiceless thing,
And our hearts yearn so with tenderness
In the beautiful time of Spring.

N. P. WILLIS

241 181 [184] THE genuine Vedda is a quite incompetent agriculturist; that is a mark by which you may know him; and none are more so than the Veddas of Bingoda who can no more develop a *chena* than they can fly. They will make a fine beginning; valiantly fell trees and sow grain; but there it ends; whenever the mood seizes them they leave it all and go into the forest, and the wild animals wander in. This is why I consider the Veddas of Bingoda the most primitive I have met; better even than the classical Veddas of Henebedde and Danigala who are more of the agriculturist and less of the hunter.

221 222 177 Though these Veddas live close to Sinhalese settlements, they spend a large part of their time in the jungle. When the forests have much to give—as in January and February, the good yam months, and June and July, the honey and fruits months—the Veddas take their families and forsake their huts for caves and stream-beds; here to-day, there to-morrow. But in times of jungle impoverishment—March to May, and September to December—they remain near the village, where at a pinch they can beg a pittance of grain; but even then foraging parties frequently wander forth and return in a few days with honey, flesh and swiftlets' nests for barter.

144 142 [826] There is, almost certainly, no Vedda to-day without some trace of Sinhalese (or Tamil) blood in his veins; a reason why anthropometry is so often arid of results; still, one can usually tell a Vedda from a Sinhalese at a glance: The sparsity of hair on the Vedda's face is his outstanding characteristic, in marked contrast to the heavily bearded Sinhalese; add to this a darker complexion, a shorter stature, a greater reserve, simplicity, and apathy, and an easily aroused ferocity of nature—and there is no more to be said. But Kaurala of Kotlinde would have it there was a further distinction: "See," said he, placing my hand on his Adam's apple. "I am a true Vedda; where is my throat-knot?"

181 Veddas are an independent folk. They are no respectors of persons; and if you wish to know them, it does not do to stand on your dignity. Displease them, and they will not come near you; treat them kindly and they are your good friends. Childish and ingenuous to a degree, they will address you on equal terms, and often show an embarrassing

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descend; while two or three others, with perhaps a dog, beat the jungle above and start the animal, which is shot almost at the point of the guns.

There is no flesh the Vedda loves more than that of the wanderoo (grey langur). He will sometimes be seen to halt by a tree, and strike its trunk three resounding blows with his axe-head. This is to discover the whereabouts of the wanderoo. On hearing the sound, these animals, imagining it to be that of a falling tree or rock, give vent to the " a-he-hik " so characteristic of them when startled.

One afternoon Suthu Banda brought in a great langur slung on his shoulder, with its tail rove through its slit cheek. Within twenty-five minutes not a morsel of the animal remained. Disjointing the tail at the root, he dissected up a strip of dorsal skin in continuation of it as far as the neck; twisting this over a branch, he suspended and rapidly skinned the quarry. The meat was cut up in pieces and placed on large logs over a fire, the flames licking them all round. Bony segments, such as the spine, ribs and limbs, were pounded on a stone when half burnt, and then replaced on embers. The stomach and entrails were slit open and their contents merely scooped away with the fingers, and roasted. No water whatever was used! It was a truly sickening sight to see the relish with which the intestines with adherent faecal matter were greedily eaten. When we remarked on the repulsiveness of it, the gluttonous epicure calmly remarked, " Yes, the filth gets eaten right enough. What of it? It is good medicine. If you get a wanderoo what haven't you got? No marriage is like it." How true is the saying that the pig and the Vedda are one!

Fish* abound in the forest streams, all bony and very indifferent to the taste. The Veddas catch these, not with rods or nets, but with poisons. The fruit, bark or root of certain trees† is smashed up and thrown into pools or banked waterways. The water is then stirred; as it gets stained the fish become restless, and leap on to the bank, or turn belly upwards stupefied. They are collected and boiled with a little salt and a few chillies and eaten at once, or dried over a trestle like meat.

Let us see what sort of fare the jungle trees provide. Of fruit there is plenty in season:—*Mora*, *kong*, *galseembela*, *veera*, *palu*, *damba*, jak, guavas, *ulkantha*, *hibutoo*, *bulanga*, *kothalanga*, *levaneya*, *karambe*, *madu* never eaten raw because it causes giddiness and vomiting!). The cabbages of palms such as *inthibuda* and *kitulalla*. Yams:—*Gonala*, *katuala*, *hirathala*, *alalla*, in order of preference. Then there are the various barks they chew incessantly to stay the hunger of their long fasts:—*Demata*, *bolvilla* and *thambola*, all substitutes for betel; and *davata* for arecanut; and besides these the barks of *opulu*, *galseembela*, *mora*, *habatha*, *nuga*, *kalawa*, *galkara*, and in fact anything, however, insipid, provided it is not poisonous.

Their medicines are few. There is *gonkuttudalu* which they crush up with water and apply to the head for headaches; *meelalla-pothu* which they smash up with *chunam* and use as a dressing for wounds; but for abrasions of the foot they will as soon rub in a little sand with

* *Walapotho, angulua, lulo, kalukanao, kanupatho, antho* (eels), *maguro, kungo, keheliyo, pethy, walihondo, sethalu, badapathalo, walihairiyo, piniweliyo, kovalayo, galpandurua.*

† *Kukurumang-gedde, kala-mul, thimbiri-gedde, dhamba-pothu, pussal-mul.*

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342 eggs of gekkoes very like candle droppings. A few of the caves have drip ledges (evidence of Sinhalese occupation) which serve to keep them dry: those without this feature are all adrip during the rains and their floors are mossy. Rocky out-crops, large loose stones and, perhaps a white-ant hill or two, divide up the floor space into sections in which the various Vedda families lie grouped, each in its allotted span. Here and there the stony floor is cupped where maize has been pounded, or worn [37] smooth where *kurrukhan* has been rubbed to flour with the flat polished stones that lie about. A fire-place or two, a cooking frame, and dry leaves (*pana*, *pinney dea*, or *helanea*), the bedding of these people, complete the picture.

Let us take the more important of the caves as we pass them on our way from Bingoda to Newaragala. Like our houses they are all named.

Matigaha galge is a deep roomy grotto formed by a superincumbent rock mass supported slantwise on large flanking boulders. Partially obstructing its entrance, and just within cover of its roof, is a steep rounded stone which one family would occupy silhouetted against a [312] tree-intersected sky. Its only source of water is the Magalavatan Aar a quarter mile away. This disadvantage, and its nearness to the Bingoda homes, accounts for its present disuse. Suthu Banda was born here. Kaurala who had not seen it since his childhood could not help a word of regret on seeing it now after the long years: "Ah!" he sighed. "Is this the old home. No one to inhabit it now,"

Galihale galge (Rock-slab cave) owes its name to a slab of rock within it, beneath which one must crawl to gain a gloomy inner compartment. A reedy pool below, and the cyfax, cactus and vines about its mouth give it a touch of wild picturesqueness.

Alu galge (Ash cave), which lies at the base of Newaragala, is less a cave than a passage under an immense boulder spanning two lateral outcrops. It is so well concealed by large stones guarding its mouth that one would not suspect its presence even when standing within a few feet of it. The floor slopes up steeply towards a narrowing exit, and is so bestrewn with rocks as to afford no convenient resting place. Yet, in a cranny here or a basin there, the Veddas contrive to make themselves comfortable, as the withered leaves that have served them as mats testify. A small tripodal frame shows where flesh has been [312] roasted. There is no lack of water here; for not only does a perennial spring lie at its entrance, the resort of innumerable bears during the drought, but in the rainy season a rivulet flows right through the cave.

● 222 This cave is a favourite of the Veddas who come here when the jak trees, which grow on the slopes of Newaragala, are in fruit. Then, spending [261] a few days, they feast to surfeiting on the tender fruit, and with their characteristic improvidence carry none away. It was here that Kaurala stayed when he "skinned" Nuwaragala—which was his own beautiful way of saying he had stripped it clean of hives. How secret are the ways of Veddas may be judged from the fact that here was a cave frequented by them without its being known to the Sinhalese who lived six miles away. And we who had once spent a night on Newaragala were ignorant that here below us was a cave used by the very Veddas we yearned to know.

261 But of all the caves I have seen *Dhik galge* was the best. I have already described this cave; it remains for me to add a few vital touches. In

5. NESTS AND HIVES

This is the time to climb the steep;
Up through the shadowy woods to grope,
Over the stones where the lichens creep,
On to the crag that crowns the slope;
To the wild bees stronghold hushed in sleep.

J. STILL

NESTS

136 222 In dark fearsome caverns, and down the sides of dizzy ravines, the little edible-nest swiftlet builds its dainty nest fashioned of hardened saliva and moss. Those who think they know better will tell you that the all but invisible specks, sometimes seen high away in the empyrean at dusk, are flights of these birds on their way to the sea to gather salt foam with which to build.

222 [439] One of the favourite pursuits of the Veddas is the collecting of these nests for barter. They call the birds *kudukarayas* (nest-makers) and their nesting caves *kudu galges*. These caves are often deep gloomy recesses only entered with lighted candles (made by squeezing a column of bees-[373] wax round a central wick of cloth or bark) to scare away the scores of poisonous snakes (*karawalas* and *mapilas*) that gather there to eat the [417] eggs and young. Sometimes the nests stud the steep sides of narrow gorges, and are then taken by the aid of cane ladders let down from above.

The nesting-places are a secret the Veddas guard closely. When they took me on one of their expeditions it was on the condition that no bearers came. A hard climb brought us to near the summit of the tree-covered mountain side. "*Cho-ho-ho*," shouted the Veddas as a warning to possible bears. The approach to the cave was over-run with *aralu-wel* (used for bows) and *niyande* (of which waist strings are made). The cave itself, surmounted by an enormous rock the fall of which seemed imminent, was dark and stifling; and it was quite a time before one could discern the cup-shaped nests that clung in clusters to the vaulted roof. A Vedda handed me a parent bird he had trapped, a tiny-beaked, brownish thing, with sweeping wings, black feet and unswallow-like tail. It was quite a time too before one realised that there was a commotion in the air, and that little wraith-like forms were flitting in and out in sore distress "Swish, swish; wing, wing; twit, twit; kisiri, bisiri; takara, takara; kata, kata, kata," as from fairy castanets, came the barely audible sounds. Outside, these were louder, "Chara-chiris, chara-chiris; che-week, che-week, che-week," they twittered in futile resentment. But to these sounds the ruthless despoilers were deaf, as, mounted on heaps of stones, they scraped away with knife or arecanut cutter the trim nests from their tenacious attachments, leaving only those with eggs behind, lest the colony be killed outright. On a boulder near by [253] was a fire-place where the young had been roasted, as Kauwa of Divulana had described.

[p. 86]

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481

" Over the edge." (Page 89)

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Honey-gatherer, girt with torches and stake, ready to descend. (Page 89)

[Facing p. 87]

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HIVES

There are five varieties of honey bee in Ceylon :—The large *bambara* (*Apis dorsata*) that builds huge combs of very pure wax on bare hill sides and the large branches of lofty trees ; the *mee massa* (*Apis indica*) sweetest honey bee of all, whose combs are to be found in hollow trees, rock-clefts and within ant-hills ; the *dandual massa* (*Apis flores*), the smallest honey-bee in the world, that hives on rocks and boughs ; the *kanava massa* (Rosin or Dammar bee) a docile, stingless, friendly little creature whose long black combs within tree crevices yield a delicious, if heady, honey ; the *kotha massa*, an even smaller species, whose puny comb is hardly worth the taking.

Kanava and *kotha* combs are available all the year round ; they are the *pathinchikarayas* or stayers. If the Vedda is hungry it is for one of these he goes at a pinch. The *bambara* and *mee massa*, the most abundant honey makers, are seasonal in their habits ; and June and July are the great honey months ; the fruit season synchronising with this, marks these months as the festive time of the jungle ; then the Veddas leave their homes for caves and stream beds, take their fill, and have a surplus for barter.

On the flavours of honey the Veddas are connoisseurs. They can tell by tasting a comb the flower or medley of flowers that contributed to its making. That honey is relished most which prevails when the *mora*, *veera* and *galseembela* are in bloom.

Honey gathering is the master art of the Vedda. Supreme as he is in other jungle crafts, he is supremest in this. As he travels through the forest he is alive to the faintest hum, and no hive, however concealed, escapes him. His adroitness in tracking a bee to its lair is well described in a delightfully euphonious song they have (beginning, *Thomba, thomba Gomba me-na-na*), that tells of a Vedda Thutha who goes on the honey quest with his brothers Gomba and Naga. Thutha leads in the trail of a particular bee ; and as he goes he sings to his brothers, indicating various trees in which bees are busy ; but not decoyed by these, and with his eye steadily on the bee he first sighted, he follows it, till eventually it guides him to its hive within the skull of an elephant—*kolanathe gatche* (tree without leaves) as he quaintly describes.

The taking of any hive, other than that of the rock *bambara*, is a very simple thing for the Vedda. All he does is to climb the tree, steady himself at the hole containing the comb, and blow into it to drive the bees away. Then with his axe he enlarges the opening sufficiently to enable him to introduce a hand and secure the cache, stopping every now and then to blow inside or to slap an offending bee. He eats the comb at his perch, grubs and all, throwing down fragments to those below.

The *bambara* comb is quite a different proposition. These great bees build high on the precipitous sides of rocks ; their security lying not in their seclusion but in their inaccessibility. These hives are the prize of the bold and skilful only. A dangling cane at Westminster Abbey gave us some idea of the daring of the enterprise. To reach the combs ladders of vines are lowered from the summit of the rock ; and down these the collector descends ; as this does not bring him within arm's length of the hives, he has usually to rely on the use of a long stake. Sometimes

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222 the hives are beyond the reach even of this: and then, though the honey itself may not be secured, the wax may, by being dislodged with long bamboos and collected at the foot of the hill; *iti bambara* (wax hives) such combs are called. There are others, so safe under prominent brows, that they are absolutely untakeable; *yakkini baliya* (she-demon's portion) is the name of them.

[417] When the rock is not too high, the ladder is made long enough to reach the ground, where it can be held slantwise close up against the face of the rock, bringing the gatherer within easier access of the hive. But where the hill is too lofty for this, as usually happens, the ladder hangs free, and the gatherer may even have to swing to and fro to enable him to get at the combs. Nor is this all; the *bambaras*, several of which may kill a man, have to be reckoned with; they can only be dispersed by heavy smoking; and, what is worse, when several hives are clustered together in a colony, the work has to be done on a pitch dark night.

Imagine then the picture of the man smothered in smoke, assailed by angry bees, swinging in the darkness two hundred feet or more above the stony earth, with neck and knee hitched to the ladder so as to leave the arms free to manipulate torch and prong. Is it a wonder that every Vedda is not a *kapunkaraya* or cutter, but only the boldest of them; and that he, when he descends to his work, does so without thought in his heart of life or father or mother?*

222 417 284 We will now describe the scene as it actually takes place:—On Panihela were five large combs the Veddas meant to have one night. That morning they assembled on the rock. Their first business was to collect the canes and vines that go to the making of the ladder (*yothala*). Two canes, some twenty or thirty feet long and about an inch in diameter, were cut, dragged to the top of the hill, and lined out. Knotting the end of one to a tree they split it in half. One man, standing at the end, held these apart; while two others stood in between, constructing strong rungs at intervals of two feet with *kiriwel* creepers, which they first looped round the two halves of the cane and then bound together with a running twist. A ladder of any length may thus be constructed; for, should a single cane not be long enough, its ends are looped and interlocked with similar loops in another length of split cane. The ladder is finished off by overlapping and binding together the free ends in the form of an U. This is the type of ladder employed in the perilous descents; where the drop is easier they do not go to all this trouble, but merely split the end of the cane for a yard or so and tie a stick across; standing on this the man is lowered.

372 222 The ladder having been completed, the *hullas* or torches and the *matha* or forked stake are yet to make. The torches, four of which are required, are designed to give a maximum of smoke, and are therefore constructed by enclosing dry *mana* grass, leaves and bark within a sheath of green leafy twigs. The *matha* or *masleya* is a stake six feet long, made of the light *velang* or *walumala*; it is pointed at one end and forked at the other by being split cross-wise into four pointed prongs which are kept apart by two pieces of stick wedged in cross-wise and tied. Both *matha* and *hulas* have long loose loops attached to them by which they are slung to the arms when not in use.

* "*Pana epa hiyaih wala bahinoy; amma thatha epa hiyala.*"

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Lastly, there is the *kangotuwa* (deer-skin receptacle for the honey), or *yakka-katte* (devil's mouth) as it is reverently called out of deference to the tutelary demons of the rock, who might otherwise be angered and send the cutter to his doom.

A pile of firewood is now collected on top of the rock to protect the guardians of the ladder, while another heap is made by those below. All being ready they await the protecting darkness. When this comes the play begins. The great fire at the foot of the rock is lit and fed abundantly with green leaves; large volumes of smoke lick uncannily up the side of the hill towards the hives; now there is a stir among the bees. As the Veddas hear it their merriment waxes great: "*Bambaru, bambaru, bambaru; thapita, thapita, thapita. Ho bambaru thuape**;" they cry. "*Giddi, giddi, giddi; rung, rung, rung,*" they jeer in imitation of the flight.

Meanwhile the fire above has been lighted, and two smoking *hulas* have been lowered towards the hives. The air is heavy with the ominous hum of angry bees.

Now is the time for the descent. The ladder, firmly secured to a tree or stone, and guarded by the brother-in-law of the cutter (the only person ineligible to marry his wife in the event of accident), is let down with a propitiatory incantation† to the demons of the rock and ancestral spirits. This being uttered, the hand grip is said to be strong and the feet to cling like jak milk to the stone.

With smoking *hulas* looped to forearms and *matha* slung on shoulder, and hair dishevelled over his face that the bees may not get at his eyes and nose, the cutter, gripping the cane with a single hand, disappears over the edge of the cliff into the darkness and the smoke. The ladder creaks as he feels his way down, for he sees nothing.

He has reached the level of the hives. At a signal the deer-skin receptacle is lowered to him, and this he secures to the ladder. Thrusting a leg between two rungs so that his foot is on the lower and his bent knee against the upper, and his head between two others so that the back of his neck is braced against a rung, he is free to use his hands. First he smokes the hives with the *hulas* mounted on the *matha* and drives away the lingering bees. Then, slinging the *hulas* on his forearms, he takes up the stake and, with its pointed end, cuts horizontally through the lower part of the comb, separating off the useless *yotha* with its contained grubs which the bees stoutly defend. He next cuts the comb in vertical sections, and, loosening each from its attachment, spits it with the pronged end of the stake, removes it, and shakes it into the receptacle at his knee. Thus he deals with all the hives.

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*"The bees, the bees, the bees; pile the fire, pile the fire, pile the fire. Ho! the bees run."

†*Yothinawa* it is called; and thus it goes:—

Haiboa, haiboa, haiboa.
Ma ninthegang kotuahoo maritchoo,
Alut upang nawanthongis maihi helaney,
Maihi ural opuhova thenawa hithen,
Hamatheyan santhosen opuaragana karunahagena.
Tho badey yanna, tho badey yanna, tho badey yanna.

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222 And as he works he sings the cutter's song* and many a vulgar song besides. For this is the epic event of the Vedda's life, and never is he so happy as when engaged in the perilous work. Wild is the jungle night and the rocks around re-echo to his song.

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The honey-gatherer at work

When the "devil's mouth" is full, he releases it from the ladder and shouts "*adapo*" (lift) to those above; they pull on the attached rope. With a series of short jerks, the cutter climbing and helping from below, the honey is lifted. As each pull brings the vessel to the level of the cutter's head he calls out "*ho-ho*," and the hauling is stopped; then, climbing a rung or two he gives a helping hand and cries "*adapo*" again. And so, with "*adapo..... ho-ho*" following each other in quick succession, the precious freight is safely hauled over the edge of the cliff. It may be that the cutter has to descend to his work again. With the last load he climbs over the top, a figure to behold—sweating, exhausted, honey-bedaubed, bereft of all the stamina that has sustained him so long. He throws himself down. Nor have all his arts availed him against the bees, for he is covered with stings. Solicitously his wife and a friend or two group round him, and with pitying words pick off the stings. But, impatient of this, he besmears himself with sand that the ants may not worry him, and is soon asleep.

Such is the story behind the potful of *bambara* honey the Vedda offers for a trifle of grain or a fragment of cloth.

Borri, borri, borri, borri,
Borri, borri, borri, borri.
Ama, ama,
Aramaya, aramaya, aramaya, aramaya,
Tholung badonage adung padung kolkoi koyya
Esale karale palang anda kanikulang
Gegung thogena yanna
Alutta Vanniya!